

What does the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge have to offer youth this summer? Youth Conservation Corps Positions

by Tai Davis

Each summer the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge hires high school students for the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) to work on a variety of projects on the refuge. The work is physically demanding, has lots of camaraderie, and makes lots of very worthwhile improvements that might not otherwise get done. Here is what we tell new applicants about the YCC program.

You will be part of a team that will learn and earn together. Yes, you'll get paid to learn, specifically, \$7.75 per hour. You'll accomplish needed conservation work on public lands and develop an understanding and appreciation of the Nation's natural environment and heritage. There will be opportunities to interact with other teens from different social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

The first week will be orientation and training. Uniforms will be issued, (steel-toed boots, hard hats, safety glasses, leather gloves, and long-sleeved shirts to wear for work). Training will cover bear safety, tool safety, CPR/First Aid, boat and cold water safety, and a swim test, where you will have to swim for 100 yards at a local pool. Job Hazard Analysis forms will be filled out for each job and enrollees will be reminded daily of safe work procedures.

The work itself often requires lifting and carrying objects, like rocks and logs. Hand tools will be used. The crew works outside in all weather conditions. It's possible to encounter wildlife. Oh, did I mention the insects? There will be times you will be working around bodies of shallow to deep cold water. Expect rugged environments. Projects could consist of trail rehabilitation, campground cabin maintenance, and maintaining any other facilities that need attention.

Last summer the team completed several work projects, three of which were spent at spike camps. The first spike camp project was making the Upper Ohmer Lake cabin more handicap-accessible by widening the path to a handicap ramp behind the cabin. The second spike camp did maintenance work on the Nurses and Caribou Island public use cabins.

The third spike camp was at the Moose Research Center, where the crew painted feeding boxes, piled old brush, tore down old feeding boxes and gates, and removed brush from a half-mile of fencing.

Other projects included trail restoration, where sawdust or gravel was used to improve the trail surface. Benches that were too high for people to sit on were lowered. Boardwalks and landscape islands were maintained. Outhouse doors were repainted. Signs that direct visitors to refuge facilities and traffic signs were maintained. The refuge headquarters building was scraped and painted, and some interior walls repainted. At the Environmental Education building, landscaping logs were put around the garden, the garden was weeded, and gravel was spread.

What will the Refuge expect from you: You should work cooperatively, be respectful of yourself and others, keep a positive attitude, show up to work on time, be ready to work, understand your assignments—and if you do not understand, ask questions—and take care of all equipment issued to you. Last but not least, be safe, have fun, and get in shape.

Crew supervisors are responsible for the well-being of all crew members. The supervisors coordinate work projects, assist other Refuge staff with projects as needed, and ensure a safe, enjoyable, unforgettable summer for each crew member.

I had a chance to hang out with the participants last summer; they were a great group of kids. It was cool going shopping with them. They picked all the right snacks/meals for their spike camps. I was even invited to go out to the campsite with them. (I think it was because I bought the food for them.) They were proud of their accomplishments. They worked really hard and did a superior job!

Participants' names will be selected by a random drawing. Employment will be June 12 to August 4. Once selected, you must be able to work the full 8-week period. Selected applicants will be notified by phone by May 5. Any applicant not selected will be notified by letter.

If for some reason you did not apply this year or were not selected, don't be discouraged. You can apply next summer, if you are age 18 or under.

Tai Davis will be experiencing her second summer in

Alaska, working as the permit specialist at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and is still loving Alaska. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.